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## Theme

Before we can effectively heal the brokenness in the world, we must allow the Gospel to heal the brokenness in us. Before we can move into our future, we must make sense of our past and embrace how it has formed who we are. We'll discover what this formula is and how you can follow it.

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## Discussion

Bonding is the ability to establish an emotional attachment to another person. It's the ability to relate to another on the deepest level. When two people have a bond with each other, they share their deepest thoughts, dreams, and feelings with each other with no fear that they will be rejected by the other person.

Bonding is one of the most basic and foundational ideas in life and the universe. It is a basic human need. God created us with a hunger for relationship— for relationship with him and with our fellow people. At our very core we are relational beings. Without a solid, bonded relationship, the human soul will become mired in psychological and emotional problems. The soul cannot prosper without being connected to others. No matter what characteristics we possess, or what accomplishments we amass, without solid emotional connectedness, without bonding to God and other humans, we will suffer.

Read John 15: 5-12

Jesus says, “ I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers”

In verse 12, Jesus points out the importance of our staying in relationship to one another: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” Without such connectedness to God and others, we will slowly wither and die, just as a branch cut off from its vine.

1. On scale of 1 to 10, how easy is it for you to establish a bonding relationship with others? Do you find yourself wanting to bond with others too quickly? Too slowly?
  - a. What are the benefits of having someone in your life who you bond with?
  - b. Why is it important to establish a relationship with God where you are sharing your innermost thoughts and feelings?

Because people have a natural need for relationship, the first stage they go through when they fail to bond with God and others is **protest**. They protest their lack of relationship. They feel sad and angry.

If isolation continues too long without relief, the protesting person moves into the second stage of **depression and despair**. The hope that needs will be met begins to wilt, like a plant without water. Depressed people look hopeless: their eyes don't sparkle, their shoulders slump, their faces are drawn and tired.

If depression and despair continue long enough without anyone intervening to relieve the loneliness, the third stage of **detachment** sets in. People who reach this stage are detached both from their own need for others and from the outside world. They are out of touch with themselves at a very rudimentary level; at times they no longer even feel alive.

2. Have you ever seen anyone experience any of the stages of isolation? Have you experienced any of them yourself?
  - a. Have you or anyone you know experienced any of the following “barriers to bonding”
    - i. Past hurt?
    - ii. Self doubt or Self hate?
    - iii. Abandonment?

b. Read 1 Thessalonians 5: 14-15

We are talking about the most vulnerable aspect of our hearts; it takes time for that to be strengthened. Paul understood this when he said, “ And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone”

c. Why is it important to be encouraging, helpful and patient with others who struggle with bonding?

Boundaries, in a broad sense, are lines or things that mark a limit, bound, or border. In a psychological sense, boundaries are the realization of our own person apart from others. This sense of separateness forms the basis of personal identity. It says what we are and what we are not, what we will choose and what we will not choose, what we will endure and what we will not, what we feel and what we will not feel, what we like and what we do not like, and what we want and what we do not want. Boundaries, in short, define us and we must take responsibility for setting those boundaries in our lives.

Many, however, do not take responsibility for their lives. They remain stuck because they want other people to change. They want others to make it better, and often those people will not. As a result, they are in bondage to others. Freedom comes from taking responsibility; bondage comes from giving it away.

3. What are the difficulties we face when taking responsibility for our actions and the situations those actions put us in?

The essence of boundaries and limits is knowing what we own and what we do not own. This leads to responsibility and love. What happens, however, when we do not own the things we should own? When we do not own ourselves as separate people from the ones we are bonded to, we develop unclear boundaries.

Our feelings, whether good or bad, are our property. They fall within our boundaries. Our feelings are our responsibility; other's' feelings are their responsibility. If other people feel sad, it is their sadness. This does not mean that they do not need someone else to be with them in their sadness and to empathize with them. It does mean the person who is feeling sad must take responsibility for that feeling.

4. Read Luke 6:26. If we feel responsible for other people's feelings, we can no longer make decisions based on what is right; we will make decisions based on how others feel about our choices. Jesus said, “Woe to you when all men speak well of you. If we are always trying to keep everyone happy, then we cannot make the choices required to live correctly and freely.

- Why is it a poor decision to sacrifice your principles for the sake of another person's feelings or to change how you are perceived? Why is this difficult?

If we take responsibility for our feelings, we can use them to solve problems. If we take responsibility for our feelings, we can use them to make our relationships better. Our anger is often a signal that someone has sinned against us. If we feel that the person who has sinned against us is responsible for our anger, we are in trouble. We will stay angry until the other person decides to make it better, and that could be a very long time.

Read Matt. 18: 15 and Lev. 19: 17

However, if we realize that our anger is our problem, we can take responsibility for it. We can use it to begin to solve the problem. Jesus has told us how: "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over". Or listen to Moses' command: "Do not hate your brother in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in his guilt".

In these two examples, the responsibility for dealing with the feelings lies with the one having them. Moses points out that we have two choices: either we reprove the one we are angry at, or this anger will turn into bitterness and hatred. When we go to the one who has angered us and work it out, then the anger can get resolved and the relationship can get better, for "iron has sharpened iron." Each person is better for it. But if we do not deal with our feelings after having been sinned against, they can turn into hatred and continue to fester.

5. Why is it hard to own your feelings when others have hurt us? What makes it difficult to confront those people? What good can come from these confrontations?

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## Application

- Connection requires that you begin to say yes to love when it presents itself. This may mean accepting invitations to be with people instead of always withdrawing. It may mean giving a different answer in safe contexts when you are asked, "How are you doing?" It may mean empathizing with another's hurt. Whatever the opportunity, it means saying "yes" to relationship.

For those who struggle with bonding, make a list of 5 ways that you can start saying yes to love when presented with it and start bonding more.

- Problems will arise when we fail to set good boundaries and maintain them. If we do not realize what we are responsible for and what we are not responsible for, we can suffer.

For those who struggle with boundaries and maintaining their true self, make a list of 5 ways that you can hold onto your identity while remaining in community.

## Additional Reading

Scriptures to read if you tend to be someone who struggles with bonding.

John 17: 20-23

Matthew 22: 37-40

1 John 4:20

Scriptures to read if you tend to be someone who struggles with boundaries.

Matthew 10: 34-36

Matthew 20: 1-15

Matthew 7:5